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Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs

Co-Chair, Congressional
Human Rights Caucus
Member, United States Holocaust Memorial Council

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

May 18, 2007

Commissioner Roger Goodell
National Football League
280 Park Avenue
New York, NY 10017

Dear Commissioner Goodell:

I write today with deep concern surrounding the allegations of dog fighting on property owned by Michael Vick of the Atlanta Falcons.

As a defender and voice for animal welfare in the U.S. Congress for more than 26 years, and as co-chair of the Congressional Friends of Animals Caucus, I am outraged that one of the National Football League's superstars is affiliated with such a heinous enterprise.

The level of cruelty involved in exploiting animals to the point that 60 malnourished and injured dogs were removed from Mr. Vick's property is mind boggling. Beyond these reprehensible accusations, the investigation also yielded arrests on drug and handgun charges that tend to be a part of the nefarious underworld of dog fighting. I know you do not believe there is anyplace for this criminal element in the NFL.

As evidence of Mr. Vick's involvement mounts, I implore you to act swiftly and forcefully. Your strong rebuke of dog fighting – and those who promote it – will send the message that this all-too-prevalent practice has no place in a civilized society. I will view anything less than the strongest repudiation of Mr. Vick's involvement as tacit support for this atrocious activity.

I also suggest you educate your players on the illegality and cruelty of dog fighting to prevent this from happening again. In 2005, the Congress used its oversight powers to stem the tide of performance enhancing drugs in the NFL; it is my hope that the issue of animal fighting will not require us to further investigate the behavior of your athletes.

I appreciate all you have done in your brief tenure as commissioner to bolster the NFL's reputation and to promote your athletes as the role models they are. I am hopeful you will continue this trend and show no tolerance for the behavior in this case.

Cordially,

TOM LANTOS
Member of Congress